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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY,
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WASHINGTON, D. C.

HINTS ON THE CARE OF FERRETS.

FOOD.

Ferrets thrive on the same kinds of food as dogs and cats. They relish small freshly killed animals, and are said to be fond of cat flesh. Ordinarily, they are fed on horse flesh or other cheap meat and on milk with bread or with a mush composed of corn meal and wheat middlings. They are usually fed twice a day. Only as much food as can be eaten immediately should be given at a time, otherwise it is likely to be stored in the nest and become offensive. All food and water, and the dishes containing them, should be clean.

PENS.

Ferrets are often kept in dry-goods boxes, but a runway of at least 3 by 6 feet is preferable. It may be built of boards or of wire netting, but in either case it should be inclosed overhead and have a floor, which may be covered with earth if desired. Pens should be located where they will be sheltered from cold winds and from excessive heat. Nest boxes should have double walls, tight roofs, and an entryway that will serve as a retreat when an animal does not care to stay in its nest.

BREEDING.

The number of young in a litter ranges from 4 to 10. They are usually born in May or June. Occasionally a second litter appears in September. The male is admitted to the pen of the female at least twice during a period of heat, which lasts about three days. The period of gestation is about 42 days. Shortly before the young are expected nest boxes should be cleaned, dusted with sulphur, and filled with soft hay or leaves.

HEALTH.

Good health is mainly dependent upon cleanliness and wholesome food. Sick animals should always be removed from contact with those that are well. They need dry, airy, warm quarters, but must be guarded from drafts. Feed them frequently with warm milk, a little at a time. Bathe sores with a weak solution of carbolic acid. If claws become too long, clip them. Constipation may be corrected by adding a little tallow to the hot mush before feeding it in milk. Intestinal troubles can usually be corrected by a meat diet.

TRAINING.

Ferrets that are to be used for driving rats or other animals must be thoroughly accustomed to being handled at an early age. They should be taught to expect food when called and to submit willingly to being caught. When lifted, they should be gently grasped around the chest and neck. It is well to encourage young ferrets that are to be used as ratters by allowing them to kill a few half-grown rats before being sent into the runways.

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Ferrets have been raised in captivity for a great many years principally to exterminate rats and to hunt rabbits.

FOOD:

The principal food of ferrets is dried bread and milk or cooked oatmeal and milk. They are usually fed twice a day. Fresh meat is fed once or twice a week. When ferrets are to be worked, the morning feed is omitted. Only as much food as can be eaten immediately should be given at a time; otherwise it is likely to be stored in the nest and become offensive. All food and water, and all dishes containing them, should be clean.

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